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The Burning-Glass
and other poems

THE
BURNING-GLASS
AND OTHER POEMS

by
WALTER DE LA MARE

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The poems in the following collection have various origins in time, mood and place. Some of them were written many years ago, and have since been revised; others recently. My gratitude is due to the Editors of the periodicals in which several of them first appeared.

W. D L L A M.

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A Portrait

Old: yet unchanged;—still pottering in his thoughts;
Still eagerly enslaved by books and print;
Less plagued, perhaps, by rigid musts and oughts,
But no less frantic in vain argument;

Still happy as a child, with its small toys,
Over his inkpot and his bits and pieces,—
Life's arduous, fragile and ingenuous joys,
Whose charm failed never—nay, it even increases!

Ev'n happier in watch of bird or flower,
Rainbow in heaven, or bud on thorny spray,
A star-strewn nightfall, and that heart-break hour
Of sleep-drowsed senses between dawn and day;

Loving the light—laved eyes in those wild hues!—
And dryad twilight, and the thronging dark;
A Crusoe ravished by mere solitude—
And silence—edged with music's faintest *Hark!*

And any chance-seen face whose loveliness
Hovers, a mystery, between dream and real;
Things usual yet miraculous that bless
And overwell a heart that still can feel;

Haunted by questions no man answered yet;
Pining to leap from A clean on to Z;
Absorbed by problems which the wise forget;
Avid for fantasy—yet how staid a head!

Senses at daggers with his intellect;
Quick, stupid; vain, retiring; ardent, cold;
Faithful and fickle; rash and circumspect;
And never yet at rest in any fold;

Punctual at meals; a spendthrift, close as Scot;
Rebellious, tractable, childish—long gone grey!
Impatient, volatile, tongue wearying not—
Loose, too: which, yet, thank heaven, was taught to pray;

‘Childish’ indeed!—a waif on shingle shelf
Fronting the rippled sands, the sun, the sea;
And nought but his marooned precarious self
For questing consciousness and will-to-be;

A feeble venturer—in a world so wide!
So rich in action, daring, cunning, strife!
You’d think, poor soul, he had taken Sloth for bride,—
Unless the imagined is the breath of life;

Unless to speculate bring virgin gold,
And *Let’s-pretend* can range the seven seas,
And dreams are not mere tales by idiot told,
And tongueless truth may hide in fantasies;

Unless the alone may their own company find,
And churchyards harbour phantoms ’mid their bones,
And even a daisy may suffice a mind
Whose bindweed can redeem a heap of stones;

Too frail a basket for so many eggs—
Loose-woven: Gosling? cygnet? Laugh or weep?

Or is the cup at richest in its dregs?
The actual realest on the verge of sleep?

One yet how often the prey of doubt and fear,
Of bleak despondence, stark anxiety;
Ardent for what is neither now nor here,
An Orpheus fainting for Eurydice;

Not yet inert, but with a tortured breast
At hint of that bleak gulf—his last farewell;
Pining for peace, assurance, pause and rest,
Yet slave to what he loves past words to tell;

A foolish, fond old man, his bed-time nigh,
Who still at western window stays to win
A transient respite from the latening sky,
And scarce can bear it when the Sun goes in.

In the Local Museum

They stood—rain pelting at window, shrouded sea—
Tenderly hand in hand, too happy to talk;
And there, its amorous eye intent on me,
Plautus impennis, the extinct Great Auk.

The Rapids

Grieve must my heart. Age hastens by.
No longing can stay Time's torrent now.
Once would the sun in eastern sky
Pause on the solemn mountain's brow.
Rare flowers he still to bloom may bring,
But day approaches evening;
And ah, how swift their withering!

The birds, that used to sing, sang then
As if in an eternal day;
Ev'n sweeter yet their grace notes, when
Farewell . . . farewell is theirs to say.
Yet, as a thorn its drop of dew
Treasures in shadow, crystal clear,
All that I loved I love anew,
Now parting draweth near.

Ariel

Ariel! Ariel!—

But the glittering moon
Sank to the curve of the world,
Down, down :
And the curlew cried,
And the nightjar stirred in her rest,
And Ariel on the cool high steep of heaven
Leaned his breast.

Ariel! Ariel!—

His curv'd wings whist,
With the bliss of the star-shaking breeze
'Gainst his pinions prest.
Lower the great globe
Rolled her icy snows :
Lone is the empty dark, and the moonless heart
When the Bright One goes.

The Summons

'What bodiless bird so wildly sings,
Albeit from no earthly tree?
Whence rise again those Phoenix wings
To waken from prolonged unease—
Isle of the Lost Hesperides!
A self long strange to me?'

'Red coral in the sea may shine,
And rock-bound Sirens, half divine,
Seduced Ulysses: but to find
Music as rare as childhood's thrush
Yet lorn as curlew's at the hush
Of dewfall in the mind!'

'O shallow questioner! Know you not
That notes like these, sad, urgent, sweet,
Call from an Egypt named the heart,
Which with a deeper life doth beat
Than any wherein thought hath part;
And of whose wisdom, Love knows well,
Only itself could tell?'

A Dull Boy

'Work?' Well, not *work*—this stubborn desperate quest
To conjure life, love, wonder into words;
Far happier songs than any me have blest
Were sung, at ease, this daybreak by the birds.

I watch with breathless envy in her glass
The dreamlike beauty of the silent swan;
As mute a marvel is the bladed grass
Springing to life again, June's sickle gone.

What music could be mine compared with that
The idling wind woos from the sand dune's bent?
What meaning deeper than the smile whereat
A burning heart conceives the loved intent?

'And what did'st *thou*' . . . I see the vaulted throng,
The listening heavens in that dread array
Fronting the Judge to whom all dooms belong:—
Will the lost child in me cry bravely, 'Play'?

Two Gardens

Two gardens see!—this, of enchanted flowers,
Strange to the eye, and more than earthly-sweet;
Small rivulets running, song-reëchoing bowers;
And green-walled pathways which, ere parting, meet;
And there a lion-like sun in heaven's delight
Breathes plenitude from dayspring to the night.

The other:—walls obscure, and chaces of trees,
Ilex and yew, and dream-enticing dark,
Hid pools, moths, creeping odours, silentness,
Luna its deity, and its watchword, *Hark!*
A still and starry mystery, wherein move
Phantoms of ageless wonder and of love.

Two gardens for two children—in one mind:
But ah, how seldom open now their gates I find!

Nostalgia

In the strange city of life
A house I know full well—
That wherein Silence a refuge has,
Where Dark doth dwell.

Gable and roof it stands,
Fronting the dizzied street,
Where Vanity flaunts her gilded booths
In the noontide glare and heat.

Green-graped upon its walls
Earth's ancient hoary vine
Clusters the carven lichenous stone
With tendril serpentine.

Deafened, incensed, dismayed,
Dazed in the clamorous throng,
I thirst for the soundless fount that rills
As if from my inmost heart, and fills
The stillness with its song.

As yet I knock in vain:
Nor yet what is hidden can tell;
Where Silence perpetual vigil keeps,
Where Dark doth dwell.

The Secret

I bless the hand that once held mine,
The lips that said:
'No heart, though kiss were Circe's wine,
Can long be comforted.'

Ay, though we talked the long day out
Of all life marvels at,
One thing the soul can utter not,
Or self to self relate.

We gazed, enraptured, you and I,
Like children at a flower;
But speechless stayed, past even a sigh. . .
Not even Babel Tower

Heard language strange and close enough
To tell that moment's peace,
Where broods the Phoenix, timeless Love,
And divine silence is.

Winter Company

Blackbird silent in the snow;
Motionless crocus in the mould;
Naked tree; and, cold and low,
Sun's wintry gold . . .

Lost for the while in their strange beauty—self how far!—
Lulled were my senses into a timeless dream;
As if the inmost secret of what they are
Lay open in what they seem.

The Solitary Bird

Why should a bird in that solitary hollow
 Flying from east to west
Seem in the silence of the snow-blanced sunshine
 Gilding the valley's crest
Envoy and symbol of a past within me
 Centuries now at rest?

Shallowly arched the horizon looms beyond it,
 Turquoise green and blue;
Not even a whisper irks the magic of the evening
 The narrowing valley through;
No faintest echo brings a syllable revealing
 The secret once I knew:
Down *whsts* the snow again, cloud masks the
 sunshine—
Bird gone, and memory too.

And So To Bed

'Night-night, my Precious!'; '*Sweet* dreams, Sweet!'
'Heaven bless you, Child!'—the accustomed grown-ups
said.

Two eyes gazed mutely back that none could meet,
Then turned to face Night's terrors overhead.

Israfel

(TO ALEC McLAREN)

1940

Sleepless I lay, as the grey of dawn
Through the cold void street stole into the air,
When, in the hush, a solemn voice
Pealed suddenly out in Connaught Square.

Had I not heard notes wild as these
A thousand times in childhood ere
This chill March daybreak they awoke
The echoing walls of Connaught Square,

I might have imagined a seraph—strange
In such bleak days!—had deigned to share,
For joy and love, the haunts of man—
An Israfel in Connaught Square!

Not that this singer eased the less
A human heart surcharged with care—
Merely a blackbird, London-bred,
Warbling of Spring in Connaught Square!

It was the contrast with a world
Of darkness, horror, grief, despair,
Had edged with an irony so sharp
That rapturous song in Connaught Square.

Harvest Home

A bird flies up from the hayfield;
Sweet, to distraction, is the new-mown grass:
But I grieve for its flowers laid low at noonday—
And only this poor *Alas!*

I grieve for War's innocent lost ones—
The broken loves, the mute goodbye,
The dread, the courage, the bitter end,
The shaken faith, the glazing eye?

O bird, from the swathes of that hayfield—
The rancid stench of the grass!
And a heart stricken mute by that Harvest Home—
And only this poor *Alas!*

The Unutterable

(September 1940)

What! jibe in ignorance, and scold
The Muses when, the earth in flame,
They hold their peace, and leave untolled
Ev'n Valour's deathless requiem?

Think you a heart in misery,
Riven with pity, dulled with woe,
Could weep in song its threnody,
And to such tombs with chauntings go?

Think you that all-abandoning deeds
Of sacrifice by those whose love
Must barren lie in widow's weeds,
Gone all their youth was dreaming of,

Can be revealed in words? Alas!
No poet yet in Fate's dark count
Has ever watched Night dread as this,
Or seen such evils to surmount.

We stand aghast. Pride, rapture, grief
In storm within; on fire to bless
The daybreak; but yet wiser if
We bide that hour in silentness.

The Spectacle

Scan with calm bloodshot eyes the world around us,
Its broken stones, its sorrows! No voice could tell
The toll of the innocent crucified, weeping and wailing,
In this region of torment ineffable, flame and derision—
What wonder if we believe no longer in Hell?

And Heaven? That daybreak vision?
In the peace of our hearts we learn beyond shadow of
doubting
That our dream of this vanished kingdom lies sleeping
within us;
Its gates are the light we have seen in the hush of the
morning,
When the shafts of the sunrise break in a myriad
splendours;
Its shouts of joy are those of all earthly creatures,
Their primal and innocent language—the song of the
birds:
Thrush in its rapture, ecstatic wren, and wood-dove
tender,
Calling on us poor mortals to put our praise into words.

Passionate, sorrowful hearts, too—the wise, the true
and the gentle;
Minds that outface all fear, defy despair, remain faithful,
Endure in silence, hope on, assured in their selfless
courage,
Natural and sweet in a love no affliction or doubt could
dispel.

If, as a glass reflecting its range, we have these for our
 guidance,
If, as our love creates beauty, we exult in that transient
 radiance,
This is the garden of paradise which in our folly
 We abandoned long ages gone.

Though, then, the wondrous divine were ev'n nebulae-
 distant,
The little we make of our all is our earthly heaven.
 Else we are celled in a darkness,
Windowless, doorless, alone,

An Island

Parched, panting, he awoke; phantasmal light
Blueing the hollows of his fevered eyes;
And strove to tell of what he had dreamed that night—
In stumbling words its meaning to devise:—

An island, lit with beauty, like a flower
Its sea of sapphire fringed with ocean's snow,
Whose music and beauty with the changing hour
Seemed from some inward source to ebb and flow;
A heart, all innocence and innately wise,
Well-spring of very love appeared to be—
'A candle whose flame', he stammered, 'never dies,
But feeds on light itself perpetually.
Me! This! A thing corrupt on the grave's cold brink,
And into outer darkness soon to sink!'

The tired nurse yawned. 'A strange dream that!' she said.
'But now you are awake. And see, it's day!'
She smoothed the pillow for his sweat-dark head,
Smiled, frowned; 'There, sleep again!'—and turned away.

The Scarecrow

In the abandoned orchard—on a pole,
The rain-soaked trappings of that scarecrow have
Usurped the semblance of a man—poor soul—
 Haled from a restless grave.

Geese for his company this fog-bound noon,
He eyeless stares. And I with eyes reply.
Lifting a snakelike head, the gander yelps
 ‘*Ware!*’ at the passer-by.

It is as though a few bedraggled rags
Poised in this wintry waste were lure enough
To entice some aimless phantom here to mime
 All it is image of . . .

Once Man in grace divine all beauty was;
And of his bone God made a lovelier Eve;
Now even the seraphs sleep at sentry-go;
 The swine break in to thief

Wind-fallen apples from the two old Trees.
Oh see, Old Adam, once of Eden! Alas!
How is thy beauty fallen: fallen thine Eve,
 Who did all life surpass!

Should in the coming nightfall the Lord God,
Goose-challenged, call, ‘My Creature, where art *thou?*’
Scarecrow of hate and vengeance, wrath and blood,
 What would’st thou answer now?

The Burning-Glass

No map shows my Jerusalem,
No history my Christ;
Another language tells of them,
A hidden evangelist.

Words may create rare images
Within their narrow bound;
'Twas speechless childhood brought me these,
As music may, in sound.

Yet not the loveliest song that ever
Died on the evening air
Could from my inmost heart dissever
What life had hidden there.

It is the blest reminder of
What earth in shuddering bliss
Nailed on a cross—that deathless Love—
Through all the eternities.

I am the Judas whose perfidy
Sold what no eye hath seen,
The rabble in dark Gethsemane,
And Mary Magdalene.

To very God who day and night
Tells me my sands out-run,
I cry in misery infinite,
'I am thy long-lost son.'

Edges

Think you your heart is safely at rest,
Contemptuous, calm, disdainful one?
Maybe a stone is in your breast
 From whence all motion's gone.

Undauntible soldier, vent no scorn
On him who in terror faced the foe;
There is a radiant core of rapture
 None but the fearful know.

And you, sweet poet? Heaven might kiss
The miracles you dreamed to do;
But waste not your soul on self-sought bliss,
 Since no such dream comes true.

Swifts

(1943)

No; they are only birds—swifts, in the loft of the
morning,
Coursing, disporting, courting, in the pale-blue arc of
the sky.
There is no venom for kin or for kind in their wild-
winged archery,
Nor death in their innocent droppings as fleet in their
mansions they fly;
Swooping, with flicker of pinion to couple, the loved
with the loved one,
Never with malice or hate, in their vehement sallies
through space.
Listen! that silken rustle, as they charge on their bee-
hive houses,
Fashioned of dried-up mud daubed each in its chosen
place.
Hunger—not fear—sharps the squawk of their feather-
less nestlings;
From daybreak into the dark their circuitings will not
cease:
How beautiful they!—and the feet on earth's heavenly
mountains
Of him that bringeth good tidings, proclaimeth the
gospel of peace!

The Visitant

A little boy leaned down his head
Upon his mother's knee;
'Tell me the old, old tale', he said,
'You told last night to me.'

It was in dream. For when at dawn
She woke, and raised her head,
Still haunted her sad face forlorn
The beauty of the dead.

The Field

Yes, there was once a battle here :
There, where the grass takes on a shade
Of paradisal green, sun-clear—
 There the last stand was made.

Lullay

'Now lullay, my sweeting,
What hast thou to fear?
It is only the wind
In the willows we hear,
And the sigh of the waves
By the sand dunes, my dear.
Stay thy wailing. Let sleep be
Thy solace, thou dear;
And dreams that shall charm
From that cheek every tear.
See, see, I am with thee
No harm can come near.
Sleep, sleep, then, my loved one,
My lorn one, my dear!' . . .

I heard that far singing
With pining oppressed,
When grief for one absent
My bosom distressed,
When the star of the evening
Was low in the West.
And I mused as I listened,
With sorrow oppressed,
Would that heart were *my* pillow,
That safety my rest!
Ah, would I could slumber—
A child laid to rest—
Could abide but a moment
Assoiled, on that breast,

While the planet of evening
Sinks low in the west :
Could wake, and dream on,
At peace and at rest ;
Ere fall the last darkness,
When silence is best.

For alas, love is mortal ;
And night must come soon ;
And another, yet deeper,
When—no more to roam—
The lost one within me
Shall find its long home,
In a sleep none can trouble,
The hush of the tomb.

Cold, sombre, eternal,
Dark, narrow that room ;
But no grief, no repining
Will deepen its gloom ;
Though of voice, once adored,
Not an echo can come ;
Of hand, brow, and cheek,
My rapture and doom,
Once my all, and adored,
No least phantom can come. . . .

‘Now lullay, my sweeting,
There is nothing to fear.
It is only the wind
In the willows we hear,

And the sigh of the waves
On the sand dunes, my dear.
Stay thy wailing. Let sleep be
Thy solace, thou dear;
And dreams that shall charm
From that cheek every tear.
See, see, I am with thee,
No harm can come near.
Sleep, sleep, then, my loved one,
My lorn one, my dear !'

The Chart

That grave small face, but twelve hours here,
Maps secrets stranger than the seas',
In hieroglyphics more austere,
And older far than Rameses'.

To a Candle

Burn stilly, thou ; and come with me.
I'll screen thy rays. Now . . . Look, and see,
Where, like a flower furl'd,
Sealed from this busy world,
Tranquil brow, and lid, and lip,
One I love lies here asleep.

Low upon her pillow is
A head of such strange loveliness—
Gilded-brown, unwoven hair—
That dread springs up to see it there :
Lest so profound a trance should be
Death's momentary alchemy.

Venture closer, then. Thy light
Be little day to this small night !
Fretting through her lids it makes
The lashes stir on those pure cheeks ;
The scarcely-parted lips, it seems,
Pine, but in vain, to tell her dreams.

Every curve and hollow shows
In faintest shadow—mouth and nose ;
Pulsing beneath the silken skin
The milk-blue blood rills out and in .
A bird's might be that slender bone,
Magic itself to ponder on.

Time hath spread its nets in vain ;
The child she was is home again ;

Veiled with Sleep's seraphic grace.
How innocent yet how wise a face!
Mutely entreating, it seems to sigh,—
'Love made me. It is only I.

'Love made this house wherein there dwells
A thing divine, and homeless else.
Not mine the need to ponder why
In this sweet prison I exult and sigh.
Not mine to bid you hence. God knows
It was for joy he shaped the rose.'

See, she stirs. A hand at rest
Slips from above that gentle breast,
White as winter-mounded snows,
Summer-sweet as that wild rose . . .
Thou lovely thing! Ah, welladay!
Candle, I dream. Come, come away!

Safety First

Do not mention this young child's beauty as he stands
there gravely before you;
Whisper it not, lest there listeners be. Beware, the evil
eye!
Only as humming-bird, quaffing the delicate glory
Of the flow'r that it lives by—gaze: yes, but make no
reply
To the question, What is it? Whence comes it, this
innocent marvel?
Those features past heart to dis sever from the immanent
truth they imply?
No more than the star of the morning its image in reflex
can ponder
Can he tell of, delight in, this beauty and promise. Oh,
sigh of a sigh;
Be wise! Let your love through thought's labyrinths
happily wander;
Let your silence its intricate praises, its gratitude
squander;
But of speech, not a word: just a smile. Beware of the
evil eye!

The Blind Boy

A spider her silken gossamer
In the sweet sun began to wind;
The boy, alone in the window-seat,
Saw nought of it. He was blind.

By a lustre of glass a slender ray
Was shattered into a myriad tints—
Violet, emerald, primrose, red—
Light's exquisite finger-prints.

Unmoved, his face in the shadow stayed,
Rapt in a reverie mute and still.
The ray stole on; but into that mind
No gem-like atom fell.

It paused to ponder upon a moth,
Snow-hooded, delicate past belief,
Drowsing, a pelican from his palm . . .
O child of tragedy—if

Only a moment you might gaze out
On this all-marvellous earth we share! . . .
A smile stole into the empty eye,
And features fair,

As if an exquisite whisper of sound,
Of source as far in time and space,
And, no less sovran than light, had found
Its recompense in his face.

The Tomtit

Twilight had fallen, austere and grey,
The ashes of a wasted day,
When, tapping at the window-pane,
My visitor had come again,
To peck late supper at his ease—
A morsel of suspended cheese.

What ancient code, what Morse knew he—
This eager little mystery—
That, as I watched, from lamp-lit room,
Called on some inmate of my heart to come.
Out of its shadows—filled me then
With love, delight, grief, pining, pain,
Scare less than had he angel been?

Suppose, such countenance as that,
Inhuman, deathless, delicate,
Had gazed this winter moment in—
Eyes of an ardour and beauty no
Star, no Sirius could show!

Well, it were best for such as I
To shun direct divinity;
Yet not stay heedless when I heard
The tip-tap nothings of a tiny bird.

The Owl

Owl of the wildwood I :
Muffled in sleep I drowse,
Where no fierce sun in heaven
Can me arouse.

My haunt's a hollow
In a half-dead tree,
Whose strangling ivy
Shields and shelters me.

But when dark's starlight
Thrills my green domain,
My plumage trembles and stirs,
I wake again :

A spectral moon
Silvers the world I see;
Out of their daylong lairs
Creep thievishly

Night's living things.
Then I,
Wafted away on soundless pinions
Fly;
Curdling her arches
With my hunting-cry :

A-hooh! a-hooh:
Four notes; and then,

Solemn, sepulchral, cold,
Four notes again,
The listening dingles
Of my woodland through:
A-hooh! A-hooh!—
A-hooh!

Once

Once would the early sun steal in through my eastern
window,
 A sea of time ago;
Tracing a stealthy trellis of shadow across the pictures
 With his gilding trembling glow;
Brimming my mind with rapture, as though of some
 alien spirit,
 In those eternal hours
I spent with my self as a child; alone, in a world of
wonder—
 Air, and light and flowers;
Tenderness, longing, grief, intermingling with bodiless
beings
 Shared else with none:
How would desire flame up in my soul; with what
passionate yearning
 As the rays stole soundlessly on!—
Rays such as Rembrandt adored, such as dwell on the
faces of seraphs,
 Wings-folded, solemn head,
Piercing the mortal with sorrow past all
comprehension. . . .

 Little of that I read
In those shadowy runes in my bedroom. But one wild
notion
 Made my heart with tears overflow—
The knowledge that love unsought, unspoken,
 unshared, unbetokened,

Had mastered me through and through :
And yet—the children we are!—that naught of its
ardour and beauty
Even the loved should know.

A Recluse

Here lies (where all at peace may be)
A lover of mere privacy.
Graces and gifts were his; now none
Will keep him from oblivion;
How well they served his hidden ends
Ask those who knew him best, his friends.

He is dead; but even among the quick
This world was never his candlestick.
He envied none; he was content
With self-inflicted banishment.
'Let your light shine!' was never his way:
What then remains but, Welladay!

And yet his very silence proved
How much he valued what he loved.
There peered from his hazed, hazel eyes
A self in solitude made wise;
As if within the heart may be
All the soul needs for company:
And, having that in safety there,
Finds its reflection everywhere.

Life's tempests must have waxed and waned:
The deep beneath at peace remained.
Full tides that silent well may be
Mark of no less profound a sea.
Age proved his blessing. It had given

The all that earth implies of heaven ;
And found an old man reconciled
To die, as he had lived, a child.

‘Philip’

A flattened orb of water his,
Pent in by brittle glass
Through which his little jet-black eyes
Observes what comes to pass :
I watch him, but how hard it is
To estimate his size.

The further off he fins away
The larger he appears,
And, having wheeled and turned about,
Grows smaller as he nears !
The Great, we lesser folk agree,
Suffer from like propinquity.

But, great and small like Philip swim
In shallow waters, clear or dim ;
And few seem fully aware
Whose bounty scatters ants’ eggs there ;
And all—O Universe !—poor souls,
Remain cooped up in finite bowls ;
Whose psychic confines are, alas,
Seldom as clear as glass.

What truth, then, from the vast Beyond
Is theirs (in so minute a pond)
Concerning Space, or Space-*plus*-Time,
Or metaphysics more sublime,
Eludes, I fear, poor Philip’s rhyme.

Still Life

Bottle, coarse tumbler, loaf of bread,
Cheap paper, a lean long kitchen knife:
No moral, no problem, sermon, or text,
No hint of a Why, Whence, Whither, or If;
Mere workaday objects put into paint—
Bottle and tumbler, loaf and knife. . . .
And engrossed, round-spectacled Chardin's
 Passion for life.

The Outcasts

*The Brazen Trompe of Iron-wingèd fame
That mingleth truth with forgèd lies*

Grunting, he paused. Dead-cold the balustrade.
Full-flood the river flowed, and black as night.
Amorphous bundle poised, he listening stayed,
Then peered, pushed, stooped, and watched it out of sight.

A faint, far plunge—and silence. Then the *whirr*
Menacing, stealthy, of a vast machine.
Midnight; but still the city was astir,
And clock to clock announced the old routine.

Trembling and fevered, light of heart and head,
He turned to hasten away; but stayed—to stare:
A paint-daubed woman bound for lonely bed,
Wide mouth, and sluggish gaze, and tinsel hair,

Stood watching him. ‘That’s that,’ she said, and laughed.
‘The dead—they tell no tales. Nor living *might*.
Nor need good money talk. . . What’s more,’ she chaffed,
‘Much better out of mind what’s out of sight.

‘*And—who?*’ she added, shrugging, with a nod,
Callous and cold, towards the granite shelf.
‘Not for the first time have I wished, by God,
That I had long since gone that way myself!’ . . .

His puke-stained face twitched upwards in a smile.
‘My friend,’ he said, ‘behold one who at last

From lifelong bondage is now freed a while.
The sack you saw contained, in fact, my Past.

‘I was a writer—and of some repute,
(Candour, just now of all times, nothing burkes)—
Fiction, *belles lettres*; and I twanged the lute;
Yes, added poesy to my other works.

‘Year after year the burden grew apace;
Fame, that old beldame, shared my bed and board;
No Christian, in his pilgrimage to grace,
Bore on his back a burden so abhorred.

“‘What was she?’” Chiefly of mere fantasy made;
Seeming divine, but *Lamia* accursed.
She cared no more for me, insidious jade,
Than drunkard needs for quickening his thirst.

‘Fattened on praise, she like a vampire sat,
Sucking my life-blood, having slain my youth;
And on her hated body I begat
Twenty abortions, but not one called Truth.

‘Not, mind you, friend, it ever seemed that I
Spared of my sweat to conjure from my ink
What one might hope time would not falsify—
The most my heart could feel, my poor mind think.

‘And yet by slow sour torturing degree
There crept the vile conviction in that I—
Victim of heinous anthropophagy—
Lived on my Self, as spider lives on fly.

'Ay, and that madam, sprawling in my sheets,
Vain beyond hell, a pride that knew no ebb,
Mistress, by Satan taught, of all deceits,
Never ceased weaving her mephitic web.

At my last gasp, my door one midnight stirred.
There showed a face there, tranquil as a dove.
As if a dream had spoken—yet no word:
With some lost ghost in me I fell in love . . .

'There came this moonless night. And, see, high tide! . . .
They say when Nature brings to fruitage twins—
At jutting thigh, at spine, or otherwise tied—
And one to'rds death his pilgrimage begins,

'Severance ends both. And that may be my fate.
But now,' the grey face paled, the thin voice broke,
'I am at peace again. Myself—though late;
My last days freed from an atrocious yoke . . .'

The painted woman stared. Her glittering eyes
Weasel-wise watched him; then, to left and right,
Under the dull lead pallor of the skies,
Searched the dark bridge—but not a soul in sight . . .

Arrogance

I saw bleak Arrogance, with brows of brass,
Clad nape to sole in shimmering foil of lead,
Stark down his nose he stared; a crown of glass
Aping the rainbow, on his tilted head.

His very presence drained the vital air;
He sate erect—stone-cold, self-crucified;
On either side of him an empty chair;
And sawdust trickled from his wounded side.

Like Sisters

There is a thicket in the wild
By waters deep and dangerous,
Where—close as loveless sisters—grow
Nightshade and the convolvulus.

Tangled and clambering, stalk and stem,
Its tendrils twined against the sun,
The bindweed has a heart-shaped leaf,
Nightshade a triple-pointed one.

The one bears petals pure as snow—
A beauty lingering but a day;
The other's, violet and gold,
Into bright berries shed away;

And these a poisonous juice distil.
Yet both are lovely too—as might
Those rival hostile sisters be:
Different as day is from the night
When darkness is its dead delight;—
As love is from unchastity.

The Ditch

Masked by that brilliant weed's deceitful green,
No glint of the dark water can be seen
Which, festering, slumbers, with this scum for screen.

It is as though a face, as false as fair,
Dared not, by smiling, show the evil there.

The Dead Jay

A witless, pert, bedizened fop,
Man scoffs, resembles you:
Fate levels all—voice harsh or sweet—
Ringing the woodlands through:
But, O, poor hapless bird, that broken death-stilled wing,
That miracle of blue!

Laid Low

Nought else now stirring my sick thoughts to share,
Laid low, I watched the house-flies in the air;
Swarthy, obscene, they angled, gendering there.
And Death, who every daybreak now rode by—
Dust-muffled hoofs, lank animal, and he—
A mocking adept in telepathy,
Jerked in his saddle, and laughed into the sky . . .

‘Where is this Blind Man’s stable? Where, his grain?
What starved fowls peck his cobblestones between?
Where stews his hothouse? Why must shut remain
His iron-hinged door to those who may not bide—
As welcome guests may—for one night, then go?
What lacqueys they who at the windows hide?
And whose that scarce-heard traipsing to and fro?’

Façade!—that reeks of nightmare-dread and gloom!
Dwale, henbane, hemlock in its courtyard bloom;
Dumb walls; the speechless silence of the tomb.
No smoke its clustered chimney-shafts emit;
No taper stars at attic window-pane;
Who enters, enters once—comes not again;
A vigilant vacancy envelops it. . . .’

So chattered boding to a menaced bed;
While in the east earth’s sunrise broadened out.
Its pale light gilt the ceiling. My heart said,
‘Nay, there is naught to fear’—yet shook with dread:

Wept, 'Call him back!': groaned, 'Ah! that eyeless head!'
Impassioned by its beauty; sick with doubt:—
'Oh God, give life!' and, 'Would that I were dead!'

Eureka

Lost in a dream last night was I.
I dreamed that, from this earth set free,
In some remote futurity
I had reached the place prepared for me.

A vault, it seemed, of burnished slate,
Whose planes beyond the pitch of sigh
Converged—unswerving, immaculate—
Bathed in a haze of blinding light;

Not of the sun, or righteousness.
No cherub here, o'er lute-string bowed,
Tinkled some silly hymn of peace,
But, '*Silence! No loitering allowed!*'

In jet-black characters I read
Incised upon the porcelain floor.
Ay, and the silence of the dead
No sentient heart could harrow more.

There, stretching far as eye could see,
Beneath that flat and leprous glare
A maze of immense machinery
Hummed in the ozoned air—

Prodigious wheels of steel and brass;
And—ranged along the un-windowed walls—
Engrossed in objects of metal and glass,
Stooped spectres, in spotless over-alls.

Knees quaking, dazed affrighted eyes,
I turned to the Janitor and cried,
'Is this, friend, Hell or Paradise?'
And, sneering, he replied,

'Terms trite as yours the ignorant
On earth, it seems, may yet delude.
Here, "sin" and "saint" and "hierophant"
Share exile with "the Good".

'Be grateful that the state of bliss
Henceforth, perhaps, reserved for thee,
Is sane and sanative as this,
And void of fatuous fantasy.

'Here God, the Mechanist, reveals,
As only mechanism can
Mansions to match the new ideals
Of his co-worker, Man.

'On strict probation, you are now
To toil with yonder bloodless moles—
These skiagrams will show you how—
On mechanizing human souls . . .'

At this I woke: and, cold as stone,
Lay quaking in the hazardous light
Of earth's familiar moon;
A clothes-moth winged from left to right,
A tap dripped on and on;
And there, my handmade pot, my jug

Beside the old grained washstand stood;
There, too, my once-gay threadbare rug,
 The flattering moonlight wooed:
And—Heaven forgive a dream-crazed loon!—
 I found them very good.

But, Oh, My Dear

Hearts that too wildly beat—

Brief is their epitaph!

Wisdom is in the wheat,

Not in the chaff.

But Oh, my dear, how rich and rare, and root-down-
deep and wild and sweet

It is to laugh!

The Frozen Dell

How still it is! How pure and cold
The air through which the wood-birds glide
From frost-bound tree to tree—
Veiled with so thin a mist that through
Its meshes steals that dayspring blue!

No other life. All motion gone—
As though a spectre, night being down,
Had through this darkened dingle trod
And frozen all he touched to stone.

Where art thou, mole? Where, busy ant?
Each in its earthen fastness is
As passive as the hive-bound bees,
As squirrel drowsing free from want,
And silken-snug chrysalides,
Queens of the wasps with ash-dark eyes—
Tranced exquisite complexities—
 And buds of the slumbering trees.

Yet human lovers, astray in this
Unfathomable silentness,
Into such dreamlike beauty come,
Though it seem lifeless as the tomb,
Might pause a moment here to kiss,
Their cold hands clasped; might even weep
For joy at their own ecstasy—
This crystal cage, sleep's wizardry,
 And secret as the womb!

Birds in Winter

I know not what small winter birds these are,
Warbling their hearts out in that dusky glade
While the pale lustre of the morning star
 In heaven begins to fade.

Not me they sing for, this—earth's shortest—day,
A human listening at his window-glass;
They would, affrighted, cease and flit away
 At glimpse even of my face.

And yet how strangely mine their music seems,
As if of all things loved my heart was heir,
Had helped create them—albeit in my dreams—
 And they disdained my share.

February

Whence is the secret of these skies,
Their limpid colours, deeper light,
That ardent dovelike tenderness,
Hinting at hidden mysteries
Beyond the reach of sight?

The risen sun's not half an hour
Earlier than on St. Lucy's Day;
And scarcely twice as long as that
In loftier arch, like opening flower,
His chariot loiters on the way;

But ev'n the rain upon the cheek
A kindlier message seems to bring;
There's sweetness in the moving air,
The stars of cold December's dark
Wheel on to their last westering;

And Earth herself this secret shares.
The sap is welling in her veins;
She to the heavens her bosom bares;
Snowdrop and crocus pierce the sod;
A brightening green the meadow stains.

And at her still, enticing call
The honeysuckle leaves untwine;
A softly-warbling thrush replies;
Mosses begem the orchard wall—
A fortnight from St. Valentine!

All this in open bliss appears;
Is it but fancy that within
The heart a resurrection stirs,
Some secret listener also hears
The hosannas of the Spring? . . .

And Oh, the wonder of a face—
Darkened by illness, grief and pain—
Love scarce can breathe its speechless Grace
When, mystery of all mysteries,
That heaven-sent life steals back again!

These Solemn Hills

These solemn hills are silent now that night
Steals softly their green valleys out of sight;
The only sound that through the evening wells
Is new-born lambkin's bleat;
And—with soft rounded wings,
Silvered in day's last light,
As on they beat—
The lapwing's slow, sad, anguished
Pee-oo-eet.

Sheep

Early sunbeams shafting the beech-boles,
An old oak fence, and in pasture deep—
Dark, and shapeless, dotting the shadows—
A grazing and motionless flock of sheep;

So strangely still as they munched the grasses
That I, up aloft on my 'bus, alone,
At gaze from its glass on the shimmering highway,
Cried on myself:—'Not sheep! They are stone!'

Sarsen outcrops shelved by the glaciers?
An aeon of darkness, ice and snow?
Beings bewitched out of far-away folk-tales?
Prodigies such as dreams can show? . . .

The mind—that old mole—has its hidden earthworks:
Blake's greybeard into a thistle turned;
And, in his childhood, flocking angels
In sun-wild foliage gleamed and burned.

Illusions. . . Yet—as my 'bus lurched onward,
Beech trees, park-land and woodland gone,
It was not sheep in my memory lingered
But, strangely indwelling, those shapes of stone.

The Creek

Where that dark water is,
A Naiad dwells,
Though of her presence
Little else
Than her own silence tells.

Her twilight is
The pictured shade
Between a dream
And the awakening made.

Stranger in beauty she must be—
Cold solemn face and eyes of green—
Than tongue could say,
Or aught that earthly
Sight hath seen.

Human touch,
Or gaze, or cry
Would ruin be
To her half-mortal frailty;
As to the surface of her stream
A zephyr's sigh.

Absence

When thou art absent,
Grief only is constant,
My heart pines within me
Like the sighing of reeds
Where water lies open
To the darkness of heaven,
Voiceless, forsaken.

The bird in the forest
Where silence endureth,
The flower in the hollow
With down-drooping head—
Ah, Psyche, thy image!—
My soul breathes its homage;
But cold is this token,
Cold, cold is thy token,
When from dream I awaken,
By sorrow bestead.

The Brook

Here, in a little fall,
From stone to stone,
The well-cool water drips,
Lips, sips,
And, babbling on,
Repeats its secret bell-clear song
The whole day long.

From what far caverns,
From what soundless deep
Of earth's blind sunless rock
Did this pure wellspring seep—
As may some praeternatural dream
In sleep?

The Rainbow

Stood twice ten thousand warriors on green grass
Ranked in that loop of running silver river,
The bright light dazzling on their steel and brass,
 Plumed helm, cuirass,
Tipped arrow, ivoried bow, and rain-soaked quiver;

And from these April clouds the blazing sun
Smote through the crystal drops of rain descending;
And, ere an instant of mere time was run,
 Or tongue could cry, *It's done!*
There spanned the east an arch all hues transcending:
Why, *then* would twice ten thousand dye the skies—
A different rainbow for each pair of eyes!
Oh, what a shout of joy might then be sent
From warrior throats, to crack the firmament!

But only a child was there—by that clear stream,
Reading a book, in shelter of a willow.
He raised his head to scan the radiant scene,
 His gaze aloof, serene,
 Smiling as if in dream;
And, sleeping, smiled again that night—his head upon
 his pillow.

The Gnomon

I cast a shadow. Through the gradual day
Never at rest it secretly steals on ;
As must the soul pursue its earthly way
And then to night be gone.

But Oh, demoniac listeners in the grove,
Think not mere Time I now am telling of.
No. But of light, life, joy, and awe, and love :
I obey the heavenly Sun.

Empty

The house by the sand dunes
Was bleached and dark and bare ;
Birds, in the sea-shine,
Silvered and shadowed the air.

I called at the shut door,
I tirmed at the pin :
Weeks—weeks of woesome tides,
The sand had drifted in.

The sand had heaped itself about
In the wefting of the wind ;
And knocking never summoned ghost ;
And dreams none can find

Like coins left at full of flood,
Gold jetsam of the sea.
Salt that water, bitter as love,
That will let nothing be

Unfevered, calm and still,
Like an ageing moon in the sky
Lighting the eyes of daybreak—
With a wick soon to die.

What then was shared there,
Who's now to tell?
Horizon-low the sea-borne light,
And dumb the buoyed bell.

Lovers

There fell an hour when—as if clock
Had stayed its beat—their hearts stood still
At challenge of a single look,
Rapt, speechless, irretrievable.

Once, before lips had dreamed of kissing,
They languished, mind and soul, to see
Each the loved other's face; that missing,
In no wise else at peace could be.

Sleep, wherein not even dreams intrude,
Heart's haven may be from all that harms;
'Twere woe to the selfless solitude
They find in one another's arms.

Fantastic miracle, that even,
Though now all else seems little worth,
Would sacrifice the hope of heaven
While love is theirs on earth!

‘Said Flores’

‘If I had a drop of attar
And a clot of wizard clay,
Birds we would be with wings of light
And fly to Cathay.

‘If I had the reed called Ozmadoom,
And skill to cut pen,
I’d float a music into the air—
You’d listen, and then . . .

‘If that small moon were mine for lamp,
I would look, I would see
The silent thoughts, like silver fish,
You are thinking of me.

‘There is nothing upon grass or ground,
In the mountains or the skies,
But my heart faints in longing for,
And the tears drop from my eyes.

‘And if I ceased from pining—
What buds were left to blow?
Where the wild swan? Where the wood-dove?
Where *then* should I go?

Not One

Turn your head sidelong;
Gentle eyelids close;
In their small darkness
Be all night's repose;
Weaving a dream—strange
Flower and stranger fruit—
Wake heart may pine for
But the day gives not.

Rest, folded lips,
Their secret word unsaid;
Slumber will shed its dews,
Be comforted:
Whilst I my vigil keep,
And grieve in vain
That not the briefest moment—yours or mine—
Can ever come again.

The Bribe

Ev'n should I give you all I have,—
From harmless childhood to the grave;
Call back my firstborn sigh, and then
Rob heaven of my last *Amen*;
Even if travelling back from Styx,
I brought you Pilate's crucifix;
Or, lone on Lethe, dredged you up
Melchior's golden Wassail cup;
Or Maacha's jewelled casket where
She shrined a lock of Absalom's hair;
Or relic whereon Noah would brood—
Keepsake of earth before the Flood;
Or flower of Adam's solitude;
The smile wherewith unmemoried Eve
Awoke from sleep, her fere to give,
And he, enravished, to receive;
Yes, and the daisy at her foot
She gazed at, and remembered not:
Nay, all Time's spoil, in dust put by,
Treasure untold to glut the eye—
Pining, and wonder, and mystery,
Rare and precious, old and strange,
Withersoever thought can range,
Fish can swim, or eagle fly,
Harvesting earth, and sea, and sky;
And yours could be the empery:—
What use?

There is no power or go-between or spell in time or space
Can light with even hint of love one loveless human face.

Not Yet

'Not love me? Even yet!'—half-dreaming, I
whispered and said.

Untarnished, truth-clear eyes; averted,
lovely head:

It was thus she had looked and had listened—how often—
before she was dead.

Divided

Two spheres on meeting may so softly collide
They stay, as if still kissing, side by side.
Lovers may part for ever—the cause so small
Not even a lynx could see a gap at all.

Treasure

Reason as patiently as moth and rust
 May fret life's ardours into dust;
But soon—the sun begins to shine, and then—
Undaunted weeds!—they up, they spring, they spread
 —romp into bloom again.

Cupid Kept In

When life's wild noisy boys were out of school,
And, for his hour, the usher too was gone,
Peering at sun-fall through the crannied door,
I saw an urchin sitting there alone.

His shining wings lay folded on his back,
Between them hung a quiver, while he sat,
Bare in his beauty, and with poring brows
Bent o'er the saddening task-work he was at.

Which means she?—Yes or No? his problem was.
A gilding ray tinged plume and cheek and chin;
He frowned, he pouted, fidgeted, and wept—
Lost, mazed; unable even to begin!

But then, how could (Oh, think, my dear!), how *could*
That little earnest but unlettered mite
Find any meaning in the heart whose runes
Have kept me tossing through the livelong night?

What wonder, then, when I sighed out for shame,
He brought his scribbled slate, tears in his eyes,
And bade me hide it, until you have made
The question simpler, or himself more wise?

Scholars

Logic does well at school;
And Reason answers every question right;
Poll-parrot Memory unwinds her spool;
And Copy-cat keeps Teacher well in sight:

The Heart's a truant; nothing does by rule;
Safe in its wisdom, is taken for a fool;
Nods through the morning on the dunce's stool;
And wakes to dream all night.

Thou Art My Long-Lost Peace

Thou art my long-lost peace;
All trouble and all care,
Like winds on the ocean cease—
Leaving serene and fair
The evening-gilded wave
Above the unmeasured deep—
When those clear grave dark eyes
Call to the soul, in sleep—

In sleep. The waking hour—
How sweet its power may be!
Lovely the bird, the flower,
That feigns Reality!
But further yet, there is
A spirit, strange to earth,
Within whose longing lies
What day can not bring forth.

So I, though hand and lip,
Being body's, pine for thine,
Watch from my dreams in sleep
What earthly clocks resign
To cloaked Eternity:
Then weeping, sighing, must go
Back to his haunt in me,
In rapture; and in woe.

The Undercurrent

What, do you suppose, we're in this world for, sweet heart?

What—in this haunted, crazy, beautiful cage—
Keeps so many, like ourselves, poor pining human creatures,

As if from some assured, yet withholden heritage?
Keeps us lamenting beneath all our happy laughter,
Silence, dreams, hope for what may *not* come after,
While life wastes and withers, as it has for all mortals,
Age on to age, on to age?

Strange it would be if the one simple secret
Were, that wisdom hides, as beauty hides in pebble,
leaf and blade;
That a good beyond divining, if we knew but where to
seek it,
Is awaiting revelation when—well, *Sesame* is said;
That what so frets and daunts us ev'n in all we love
around us
Is the net of worldly custom which has penned us in and
bound us;
That—freed—our hearts would break for joy
Arisen from the dead.

Would 'break'? What do I say?
Might that secret, if divulged, all we value most bewray!
Make a dream of our real,
A night of our day,
That word said?

Oh, in case that be the answer, in case some stranger
call us,

Or death in his stead;

Sweet Nought, come away, come away!

Outer Darkness

'The very soul within my breast . . .'

'Mute, motionless, aghast . . .'

Uncompanied, forlorn, the shade of a shade,
From all semblance of life I seemed to have strayed
To a realm, and a being—of fantasy made.
Where the spirit no more invokes Reason to prove
An illusion of sense it is cognisant of.

I was lost: but aware.

I had traversed the stream

By that nebulous bridge which the waking call dream,
And was come to an ultimate future that yet
Was the dust of a past no remorse could forget—

Heart, could covet no more,

Nor forget.

Wheresoever my eyes might forebodingly range
They discerned the familiar disguised as the strange,—
Relics of memoried objects designed
To enchant to distraction an earth-enthralled mind,
A sense-shackled mind.

The door was ajar when I entered. And lo!
A banquet prepared for one loved, long ago.
But I shunned to peer close, to detect what was there,
As I stood, lost in reverie, facing that chair.
In anguish and dread I dared not surmise
What fate had befallen those once ardent eyes,
The all-welcoming hands, the compassionate breast,

And the heart now at rest,
Ev'n from love now at rest.

The glass she had drunk from beamed faintly. Its lees
Were as dry as the numberless sands of the seas
In a lunar volcano parched up by the sun
Ere the Moon's frenzied courtship of Earth had begun.
Once, the flame of that candle had yearned to retrace
The heart-breaking secrets concealed in her face—

Gentle palace of loveliness: avid to steep
With its motionless radiance cheek, brow and lip;
And in innocent scrutiny striving to win
Through the windows now void to the phantom within,
To the spirit secluded within.

Now its refuse was blackened. The brass of its stick—
The virginal wax guttered down to the wick—
Was witch-hued with verdigris. Fret-moth and mouse
Had forsaken for ever this house.

As I moved through the room I was frosted with light;
Decay was here Regent of Night.

It clotted the fabric of curtain and chair
Like a luminous mildew infesting the air;
An æon had waned since there fell the faint call
Of the last mateless insect at knock in the wall.

The once rotten was dry—gone all sense of its taint;
The mouldings were only the shell of their paint,
Though their valueless gold
Glimmered on, as of old:

So remote was this hush: where none listens or hears;
By all sweetness deserted for measureless years,
The wilderness mortals call years.

And I?

And I? Ghost of ghost, unhousel'd, foredone—
Candle, fleet, fire—out of memory gone.
Appalled, I peered on in the glass at the face
Of a creature of dread, lost in time, lost in space,
Pilgrim, waif, outcast, abandoned, alone,
In a sepulchred dark, mute as stone.
Yet of beauty, past speech, was this region of Nought
And the reflex of images conjured by thought—
Those phantoms of flow'rs in their pitcher of glass
Shrined a light that no vision could ever surpass.
In that sinister dusk every leaf, twig and tree
Wove an intricate web of significancy;
And those hills in the moonlight, a somnolent green,
Still awakened a yearning to scan the unseen,
 To seek haven within the unseen.

Alas, how can anguish and grief be allayed
 In a soul self-betrayed?
Yet that emblem of Man, in its niche by the door,
Limned a passionate pathos unheeded of yore,
A wonder, a peace, disregarded before,
 A grace that no hope could restore.

I had drunken of death. The night overhead
Was a forest of quietude, stagnant as lead;
Starless, tranquil, serene as the dead;
 The last love-stilled look of the dead.
Cold, as the snow of swan in her sleep
On pitiless Lethe to heart and to lip,
Was the void that enwrapped me—by slumber betrayed;
 Ecstatic, demented, afraid:

In a zero, forsaken, marooned : not a sigh.
An existence denuded of all but an I ;
 And those relics near by :
 Neither movement nor sigh.

Till a whisper within, like a breath from the tomb,
Asked me, 'Knowest thou not wherefore thus thou art
 come
 To this judgement, this doom?'
And my heart in my dreams stayed its pulsings: 'Nay,
 why?'

But Nothingness made no reply.

Out of a Dream

Out of a dream I came—
Woeful with sinister shapes,
Hollow sockets aflame,
The mouth that gapes
With cries, unheard, of the dark;
The bleak, black night of the soul;
Sweating, I lay in my bed,
Sick of the wake for a goal.

And lo—Earth's close-shut door,
Its panels a cross, its key
Of common and rusting iron,
Opened, and showed to me
A face—found; lost—of old:
Of a lifetime's longing the sum;
And eyes that assuaged all grief:
 'Behold! I am come.'

Joy

This little wayward boy
Stretched out his hands to me,
Saying his name was Joy;
Saying all things that seem
Tender, and wise, and true
Never need fade while he
Drenches them through and through
With his sweet mastery;
Told me that Love's clear eyes
Pools were without the sky,
Earth, without paradise,
Were he not nigh;
Even that grief conceals
Him in a dark disguise;
And that affliction brings
All it denies.

Not mine to heed him then—
Till fell the need—and Oh,
All his sweet converse gone,
Where could I go?
What could I do?—
But seek him up and down,
Thicket and thorn and fell,
Till night in gloom came on
Unpierceable?

Then, when all else must fail,
Stepped from the dark to me,
Voiced like the nightingale,
Masked, weeping, he.

The Vision

O starry face, bound in grave strands of hair,
Aloof, remote, past speech or thought to bless—
Life's haunting mystery and the soul's long care,
Music unheard, heart's utter silentness,
Beauty no mortal life could e'er fulfil,
Yet garnered loveliness of all I see,
Which in this transient pilgrimage is still
Steadfast desire of that soul's loyalty;

Death's haunting harp-string, sleep's mandragora,
Mockery of waking and the dark's despair,
Life's changeless vision that fades not away—
O starry face, bound in grave strands of hair!
Hands faintly sweet with flowers from fields unseen,
Breasts cold as mountain snow and far waves' foam,
Eyes changeless and immortal and serene—
Spent is this wanderer, and you call him home!

Son of Man

(an Epitaph from *Strangers and Pilgrims*)

Son of man, tell me,
Hast thou at any time lain in thick darkness,
Gazing up into a lightless silence,
A dark void vacancy,
Like the woe of the sea
In the unvisited places of the ocean?
And nothing but thine own frail sentience
To prove thee living?
Lost in this affliction of the spirit,
Did'st thou then call upon God
Of his infinite mercy to reveal to thee
Proof of his presence—
His presence and love for thee, exquisite creature of his
creation?
To show thee but some small devisal
Of his infinite compassion and pity, even though it were
as fleeting
As the light of a falling star in a dewdrop?
Hast thou? O, if thou hast not,
Do it now; do it now; do it now!
Lest that night come which is sans sense, thought,
tongue, stir, time, being,
And the moment is for ever denied thee,
Since thou art thyself as I am.

Whiteness

I stay to linger, though the night
Is draining every drop of light
From out the sky, and every breath
I breathe is icy chill as death.
Not so much colour now there shows
As tinges even the palest rose;
Nor in this whiteness can be seen
The faintest trace of hidden green.

Scarlet would cry as shrill as fife
Here where there stirs no hint of life.
A child in rare vermilion,
Come out to wonder at the snow:
Like Moses' burning bush would show—
Its bonfire out, when he is gone!

Yet in this pallor every tree
A marvel is of symmetry,
As if enthralled by its own grace—
A music woven of silentness.
Dense hoarfrost clots the tresses of
That weeping elm's funereal white,
Biding the sepulchre of night
To whisper,—'It is cold, my love!'
To Winter, witless nihilist,
Who, the day long, has kept his tryst
With mistress no less mute than he,
And tranced in a like rhapsody.

As though from vacant vaults of space
Darkness transfigured haunts his face;
And, she, for spell to wreathe her brow,
Has twined the Druid mistletoe.

What viol in this frozen air
Could for their nuptials descant make?
What timbrels Eros bid awake?
Ask of those solemn cedars there!

Solitude

When the high road
Forks into a by-road,
And that drifts into a lane,
And the lane breaks into a bridle-path,
A chace forgotten
Still as death,
And green with the long night's rain;
Through a forest winding on and on,
Moss, and fern, and sun-bleached bone,
Till only a trace remain;
And that dies out in a waste of stone
A bluff of cliff, vast, trackless, wild,
Blue with the harebell, undefiled;
Where silence enthralls the empty air,
Mute with a presence unearthly fair,
And a path is sought
In vain. . . .

It is then the Ocean
Looms into sight,
A gulf enringed with a burning white,
A sea of sapphire, dazzling bright;
And islands,
Peaks of such beauty that
Bright danger seems to lie in wait,
Dread, disaster, boding fate;
And soul and sense are appalled thereat;
Though an Ariel music on the breeze
Thrills the mind with a lorn unease,

Cold with all mortal mysteries.
And every thorn,
And weed, and flower,
And every time-worn stone
A challenge cries on the trespasser :
Beware!
Thou art alone!

The Unrent Pattern

I roved the Past—a thousand thousand years,
Ere the Egyptians watched the lotus blow,
Ere yet Man stumbled on his first of words,
Ere yet his laughter rang, or fell his tears;
And on a hillside where three trees would grow—
 Life immortal, Peace, and Woe:
 Dismas, Christ, his bitter foe—
Listened, as yesterday, to the song of birds.

Dust

Sweet sovereign lord of this so pined-for Spring,
How breathe the homage of but one poor heart
With such small compass of thy everything?

Ev'n though I knew this were my life's last hour,
It yet would lie, past hope, beyond my power
One instant of my gratitude to prove,
 My praise, my love.

That 'Everything'!—when this, my human dust,
 Whereto return I must,
Were scant to bring to bloom a single flower!

The Old Author

The End, he scrawled, and blotted it. Then eyed
Through darkened glass night's cryptic runes o'erhead.
'My last, and longest book.' He frowned; then sighed:
 'And everything left unsaid!'

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